

observations of a late fourteenth-century Genoese functionary in attempting, whilst carrying out his principal activities, to secure a young Romanian slave girl for Francesco Datini, the stipulation of fines in Copenhagen guild for those who could not hold their ale or of the life and death of the 120-year-old Bonaccorso di Pietro. Others are redolent with the sounds of life, and not only town life, as in the account by Fitzstephen of ice-skating in late twelfth-century London, or the early fourteenth-century revels in the High Street following a wake at Oxford which resulted in another death. Alongside such random snippets the broader themes of medieval urban history are certainly brought out in this collection and there is much here to which those using the primer as a teaching resource can point as useful example. In her selection of already-published sources, that is where she is relying on previous translated editions of a source and not her own translation or a translation which she has commissioned (of both of which there are a good number), Kowaleski does not always use the most recent edition or translation. While this is not a significant problem in terms of the aims of the present publication, it does allow some eccentricities and rather dated interpretations to intrude. Thus, for instance, the report of risings at Bristol in 1316, taken from the *Vita Edwardi Secundi* of which there are two more recent editions, relies on a nineteenth-century source-book which, presumably itself employing the earlier Rolls Series edition of Stubbs, identifies this as the work of the 'monk of Malmesbury' and employs some fairly antiquated terminology (Aymer de Valence appears as Adolmar, etc.).

The volume includes, as already noted, a short introduction which, in its style and approach, emphasizes again the intention to provide a primer for students, directing a putative readership to the key interpretative issues associated with the sources gathered here. A chronological table and a list of sources are also included, as are a series of research questions which, following each source, are intended to encourage further reflection on the material to hand.

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Alan R. MacDonald, *The Burghs and Parliament in Scotland, c. 1550–1651*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. xv + 236pp. Bibliography. £55.00.
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Alan MacDonald's study of the relationship between the Scottish parliament and Scotland's burghs in the late medieval period opens with a positive statement: 'Happily, the Scottish parliamentary historian no longer needs to lament the dearth of recent scholarship' (p. 1). Dr MacDonald is equally positive about the state of Scottish urban history. I have suggested elsewhere that the picture is less rosy than it might be, but if you take my view, this only reinforces the significance of Dr MacDonald's perceptive, balanced and thorough study.

The Scottish royal burghs, in contrast to burghs of barony and regality, held their privileges directly from the crown. Unlike their English counterparts, Scottish royal burghs attended parliament as an estate in their own right, were taxed as a separate estate and convened in their own forum, called the Convention of

Royal Burghs. Firmly rooted in a historiography that has emphasized procedures and forms over power-politics, Dr MacDonald's study concludes that the burghs were primarily concerned with a 'predictable range' (p. 66) of economic and social matters. The Convention proved consistently unwilling to stray into the kind of contentious politics that the General Assembly of the church, by comparison, seemed unable to prevent itself from dabbling in; as a result, Dr MacDonald finds 'there is little to be said' (p. 79) on high politics. The importance of the Convention therefore lay in its ability to protect the interests of the Scottish merchant elite. Their success, Dr MacDonald convincingly argues, was largely down to the 'group consciousness' (p. 58) forged by regular meetings of the Convention. As other works have shown, the classic expression of burgh unity came in the wake of the Prayer Book riots of 1637: the nascent Covenanted regime's claim to represent the nation was given greater credibility when the Convention – led by Edinburgh, of course – swung behind the movement. The crises of the 1640s would, however, test burgh unity to its limits and reveal the essential vulnerability of an estate that, for all its collective bargaining power, struggled to operate in 'a fully multicameral parliament . . . increasingly dominated by landed wealth' (p. 82).

If Dr MacDonald is right to conclude that, 'in parliamentary politics, the burghs, collectively and individually, did not make a significant impact' (p. 183) – although I would argue for Edinburgh as a qualified exception to this rule – he nonetheless makes an intriguing point about the importance of the burghs as the usual hosts of parliaments. In most European states, it is argued here, representative estates moved into royal palaces in the medieval period. The Scottish case is complicated by the existence of two forms of representative assembly. Conventions of the estates were essentially 'creatures of the crown' (p. 136) and lacked the legitimacy and authority of full meetings of the estates, convened explicitly as parliaments. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Scottish conventions met wherever the king happened to be resident, but parliaments were hosted in the tolbooths of the royal burghs. For Dr MacDonald, this discovery signals that parliaments belonged to the political nation in its entirety, not just the king. Scotland's infamously weak medieval monarchy, it is suggested, could not convincingly claim to be the sole embodiment of sovereign power, and thus the convening of parliaments in burghs symbolized that sovereignty 'was more broadly understood' (p. 155). The decision to give parliament a purpose-built home in Edinburgh from the mid-1630s is discussed at length; oddly, Dr MacDonald does not return to the issue of sovereignty. Did the permanent situating of parliament in what was expressly the king's capital city symbolize a wider intellectual struggle with what sovereignty meant in post-1603 Scotland?

For that very select group of scholars who are already familiar with Scotland's early modern urban landscape, Dr MacDonald's work provides a useful synthesis of things we knew we knew, but could not recall why we knew them. English, Irish and Continental urban historians will find a comprehensive and lucid study that makes it much less easy for comparative works to ignore the political and economic significance of the Scottish burghs.

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